



THE UNIVERSITY *of* EDINBURGH

Edinburgh Research Explorer

‘Maximum Impact! A multi-disciplinary dilemma’

Citation for published version:

Pelzer-Montada, R 2011, 'Maximum Impact! A multi-disciplinary dilemma': Review of IMPACT 7 International Printmaking Conference', pp. 4-5, IMPRINT (Journal of the Australian Print Council), Vol 44 Nr 4 Print Council of Australia.

Link:

[Link to publication record in Edinburgh Research Explorer](#)

Document Version:

Peer reviewed version

Published In:

IMPRINT (Journal of the Australian Print Council)

Publisher Rights Statement:

© Pelzer-Montada, R. (2011). 'Maximum Impact! A multi-disciplinary dilemma': Review of IMPACT 7 International Printmaking Conference. IMPRINT (Journal of the Australian Print Council) Vol 44 Nr 4 (pp. 4-5).

General rights

Copyright for the publications made accessible via the Edinburgh Research Explorer is retained by the author(s) and / or other copyright owners and it is a condition of accessing these publications that users recognise and abide by the legal requirements associated with these rights.

Take down policy

The University of Edinburgh has made every reasonable effort to ensure that Edinburgh Research Explorer content complies with UK legislation. If you believe that the public display of this file breaches copyright please contact openaccess@ed.ac.uk providing details, and we will remove access to the work immediately and investigate your claim.



MAXIMUM IMPACT!

A multi-disciplinary dilemma (managing the logistics of too much choice)

by Ruth Pelzer-Montada, Edinburgh College of Art, The University of Edinburgh, Scotland

It was a pleasure and privilege to be able to attend and participate in IMPACT7. I have been lucky to join and contribute to most IMPACT conferences. In fact, it was the first IMPACT in Bristol in 1999 which prompted me to expand my thinking and writing about printmaking beyond the production of prints.

So, was it worth flying 21,000 miles from my Scottish base to the tip of Australia?

The answer is a firm 'yes'. How could it not be so, given the hard work and good-natured Aussie humour of Marian Crawford, Ruth Bain and many others who collectively put so much into organising the event. A big thanks also goes to Monash University and the many institutions and companies for helping to fund the conference, as well as to Paul Thirkell for his support and preparatory lessons in Aussie lingo!

There are a number of reasons why this participant found the whole week so worthwhile. Particularly welcome was the structure and titling of the sessions, which avoided separation between an all-too-obvious theoretical versus practitioner stance.

In the sessions I attended the thorough peer-review process resulted in a high level of informed debate and intellectual rigour. A major contribution to the conference was the variety and strength of the keynote speakers each day. Another noticeable plus was the increased number of papers by able PhD students, which enlivened the debate.

The large overall number of presentations further testifies to the ever-improving strength and vitality of critical discourse in the field (even if it did have the effect of pulling delegates in many different directions as they tried to make a choice about which session to attend). [Should it be 'this delegate' maybe?]

The planned publication by Monash University Press of selected conference papers will be advantageous in two ways: all those who missed a specific presentation due to attending an alternative session will benefit, and the publication will bring about a deeper understanding of the main ideas gleaned from the whole event. Given the dearth of, and frequent difficulty in finding, existing critical publications, this book will contribute to a strengthening of the discourse in and around printmaking.

A crucial addition to the formal sessions were the on-campus exhibitions. The small but well-curated exhibition in the Faculty Gallery, at the entrance to the main conference venue, was complemented by another small but beautiful exhibition, *The Devil had a Daughter*, curated by Kirrily Hammond for the MuMA gallery, plus exhibitions throughout various campus buildings, often in difficult-to-negotiate spaces. Here I'm going to be partisan and mention the aptly located installation titled *The Bunker* by Scottish book artist David Faithfull. Unfortunately I was not able to visit the other openings/exhibitions in town nor events associated with the 'Month of Print' throughout Victoria which, I'm sure, would have complemented, enhanced and even altered some of the impressions gained at the conference. The very little time I had to familiarise myself with the city of Melbourne was largely spent in the impressive National Gallery of Victoria at the marvellous print exhibition *This Wondrous Land*, a welcome historical insight into 19th-century Australian society and culture. Lisa Slade's conference presentation, 'A Paper Cabinet: The Skottowe Manuscript', wonderfully complemented the exhibition through its focus on a related, albeit non-printed text.

Given the size and complexity of IMPACT7, I have some personal observations and suggestions for future conferences, not least the one to be held in Dundee in Scotland in 2013. My opinions are obviously based on those sessions or events that I attended.

The inclusion of indigenous speakers from the Asia-Pacific region was a prime motivation for me to attend the conference. The organisers clearly expanded the constituency of the conference with representatives from as far away as Brazil and Mexico, in addition to the Australasian region, Europe and North America. It remains for future conference organisers to address the question of truly globalised print community participation. South African Dominic Thorburn's paper 'Navigating the North-South Axis – Divide and Rule?' raised an important issue in this respect.

Unlike previous conferences, the workshop and demonstration program was mentioned each morning but not in the printed schedule. The emphasis this gave to papers and discussion panels may be due to funding or other constraints but it did seem to suggest a gap between theory and practice. Listing these events in the schedule would help to avoid this division.

A less contentious observation is that the addition of a short biography of all the speakers and presenters to the otherwise excellent printed paper and panel abstracts might have assisted in making choices about which session to attend. Admittedly, this information was available on the website, but a hard copy permits an-on-the-spot overview!

A further recommendation relates to the format of the panel discussions. My experience of the round-table discussion 'Printmaking and the Post-medium Condition' would indicate that, in addition to the more conventional presentation of prepared papers, a structured discussion by panel members elicits and makes for a lively involvement of conference participants. Future

conferences might use such discussion panels (even more) strategically to highlight and further the debate on particularly topical themes.

My final thoughts relate to whether, in an age of virtual connectivity combined with cash-strapped institutions and nation states, such 'actual' events as a conference will continue to be possible or justified? While not advocating a totally virtual event, might it be feasible to deploy new technologies to draw in a more diverse globally based audience who can collectively contribute both intellectually and financially to the success of the conference? IMPACT7 made great strides in this direction (notwithstanding technical problems) by transmitting a number of presentations, including Joanna Drucker's keynote speech via Skype. On the other hand, the sheer poverty in material terms of precisely those countries that one might wish to see included, is a serious, if hardly surprising obstacle. A further option worth considering might be to record presentations and/or panel discussions and make them available online in the manner of the Tate Gallery's 'Tate Channel' (see <http://tinyurl.com/3oexas8>). As suggested, this is not intended to replace a gathering of motivated people in a specific location. Geography, locality and many other factors conspire to make each conference a 'Gesamtkunstwerk' (a total work of art) that is never repeatable in quite the same way, as does the serendipity of actual engagement, which may not be quite so pronounced in virtual space.

A fitting coda to the conference was provided by an impromptu tour of the city's CBD alleys and arcades with Melbourne-based print artist Gaye Patterson, which ended with the 'discovery' of Scott Lyon's delightful letterpress small-scale installation *Fleurons* in Mailbox 141 (literally, an installation in historical wooden mail-boxes in Flinders Lane).

It was great to gain an insight into the rich and active print community 'down under'. My time here was unfortunately all too short. However, I'd be back like a goanna up a gum tree, if the opportunity to engage in such a wonderful scene and culture should once again arise!